



ARKANSAS

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

What is *Arkansas Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education*?

Arkansas is one of seven states to be selected through a nationwide RFP process to pilot a new, proven, cost-effective strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect. The strategy involves early childhood settings working with families to build protective factors around children (see right). ***Arkansas Strengthening Families*** is a collaborative initiative bringing together 23 partner organizations and state agencies from the child welfare, child abuse prevention, and early childhood fields as well as parents and community leaders. Rather than starting a new program, these partners are integrating existing strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect primarily through early care and education programs.

What are the goals of the initiative?

- To increase awareness that strengthening families is central to quality child care
- To increase the number of early childhood programs that are working to prevent child abuse and neglect by building protective factors around children
- To improve working relationships among early childhood systems, child welfare systems, and child abuse prevention programs and initiatives
- To integrate prevention planning among state agencies with a family-centered approach that includes early childhood

Who is involved?

Convened by the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and the Division of Children and Family Services. ***Arkansas Strengthening Families*** is a collaboration among more than 23 agencies, organizations, and individuals working with young children and their families across the state (see Partners list). Nationally, partner organizations are the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Zero to Three, and the National Alliance of Children's Trust Funds.

Protective Factors

With support from the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**, the Center for the Study of Social Policy spent two years researching and identifying five protective factors that prevent child abuse and neglect. These are:

For adults:

- Parental resilience
- An array of social connections
- Adequate knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need

For children:

- Healthy social and emotional development

The result of extensive research of practices and literature, these factors are now the basis of ***Strengthening Families Through Early Care & Education*** initiatives in seven states: Alaska, Arkansas, Illinois, New Hampshire, Missouri, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.cssp.org

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PARTNERS

- AR DHS, Div. of Children and Family Services
- AR DHS, Div. of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
- AR Dept. of Health
- AR Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board/Children's Trust Fund
- AR Educational Television Network
- Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
- University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Dept. of Psychiatry
- AR Dept. of Ed./Grants and Early Childhood Initiatives
- AR Dept. of Ed./Special Ed.
- Central AR Association for the Ed. of Young Children (NAEYC Affiliate)
- Integrated Systems Development and Management (non-profit)
- AR Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
- NW AR Child Care Resource and Referral Center
- AR Head Start Association - State Collaboration Project
- Paragould Public Schools/ Schools of the 21st Century
- AR Commission on Child Abuse, Rape & Domestic Violence
- AR Even Start Family Literacy
- AR Early Childhood Association
- AR Dept. of Education/Office of Education for Homeless Children & Youth
- AR Parent - Teacher Association
- AR 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- AR Centers for Effective Parenting

How long will it last?

Over two years (Jan 1, 2005 - Dec. 31, 2006) partners will lay the foundation for work that is self-sustaining and institutionalized across systems.

What results can we expect in Arkansas after two years?

- Four (4) early childhood "Promising Practices" programs are fully implementing the *Arkansas Strengthening Families* strategies and can serve as peer mentors to the *Arkansas Strengthening Families Network*.
- A network of early childhood settings (the *Arkansas Strengthening Families Network*) has increased capacity to strengthen families.
- Licensed early childhood centers are more aware of the connection between protective factors and preventing child abuse and neglect.
- Family strengthening training is both more available and more utilized by early childhood programs.
- Four (4) "Promising Practices" programs provide and model a close and effective relationship where DCFS caseworkers routinely include placement in quality early childhood education programs in service plans for children 0-5 entering the system (both intact and foster families).
- *Arkansas Strengthening Families Network* programs model a shift from focusing on risk factors to focusing on building protective factors and strengthening families as a strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect.

What is the budget?

This technical assistance project does not have a discrete budget but is supported through fund-raising and in-kind contributions from partner agencies.

How can we implement the strategies?

A good place to start is by reviewing and using the materials produced by *Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education*. A literature review, strategy papers for programs, a self-assessment guidebook, and an informational brochure are available at www.cssp.org.

Who are the main contacts for the initiative?

Sherri Jo McLemore, Director
AR Child Abuse and
Neglect Prevention Board/
Children's Trust Fund
501-664-2227
sjmclemore@arkansas.net

OR

Martha Reeder, Project Director
AR Early Childhood
Comprehensive Systems Initiative
AR DHS, Division of Child Care
and Early Childhood Education
501-682-9699
Martha.Reeder@arkansas.gov